



Sunday March 15, 2020
John 4:7-15

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Good morning.....good morning.....hello???

Okay, let's be honest here – this encounter is a little weird right?! And I mean both the one in today's gospel, and the one we're engaging in right now through this video.

Maybe you're sitting at your desk watching this on your computer, or maybe you're lying on the couch checking this out on your cell phone or tablet – regardless of where you are or how you're receiving this – *encounters*, whether they take place by chance or by design, can be downright strange at times.

Sometimes encounters come about like the one that takes place between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well, and other times they appear like the one unexpectedly forced upon us by the coronavirus pandemic. Regardless how they happen, they have the power to change us – and, as difficult as it may be for us to see, they can even help us grow.

Given our present circumstances, today's gospel couldn't have come at a better time. The story of Jesus and the woman at the well speaks deeply to the barriers that come between us encountering God, and one another – two things that are most definitely on our minds.

And while so much of our current reality may seem like an insurmountable barrier trying to keep us from encountering God and one another – the locked doors to worship spaces, quarantines recommended or imposed, shoppers hoarding supplies, price gouging, bans on mass gatherings, businesses and schools sending employees and students to be at a distance, along with the constant barrage of confusing, stress-inducing, and ever changing media coverage – maybe what we need most right now is simply to pause and take a deep breath in order to gain some perspective.

Just because we're engaged in a temporary time of separation, doesn't mean that we have to completely disconnect. Social distancing and complete isolation are entirely different. And even if your current or future health condition forces you to physically isolate, it doesn't have to mean that you're cut off from all forms of connection.

So, although it's no surprise that these are trying times on everyone – in the midst of these chaotic and uncertain days, I think what we all need most is a word of hope and a reminder that God is with us – God is *always* with us.

See, the barriers to connection that Jesus and the woman at the well experienced were not all that different from those we're facing today. While the social and cultural rules would have most definitely prohibited a Jewish rabbi and a Samaritan woman from encountering one another, neither Jesus nor the woman let this stop them. When Jesus meets the woman at the well, we find both of them not only crossing the boundaries of their cultures but leaping over those boundaries.

Today's gospel should come as our reminder of that. What Jesus did was to cross every boundary to ensure that this woman would encounter the reckless and gracious love of God – and the woman crosses boundaries in order to know God and be known by God.



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As the Body of Christ, especially in these uncertain times, the Holy Spirit of God is calling upon us to do this as well – even if that means it has to come across in strange and unexpected ways.

So as we try to reimagine what encountering God and each other can look like in our present circumstance, I wish for you to consider the following – go out take a walk around your neighborhood and if you happen to cross paths with someone along the way, just remember to leave a little bit of space and consider saying, “good morning,” “hello,” or “how are you” and then share a little wave. Talk to your neighbors or a passer-by even if it occurs from across the yard, the driveway, or the street. Rediscover creation in your backyard, a local park, a nature trail, or the open spaces that surround us.

And if you’re too uncomfortable to leave the house, then pick up your landline or cell phone and make a call – yes that is still a thing. Or send an email, or video chat through Facetime or Skype, or get on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or any other social media platform to stay connected to others. And even though these next few `should seem obvious – open up your Bible and be immersed in the stories of God’s love for the world, set aside time to pray, and then be sure leave space to listen for the voice of God.

The encounter between Jesus and this Samaritan woman should show us that God’s love, which lies within all of us – is counter-cultural, it’s unexpected, it’s unconventional, it’s radical – and so too should our desire and our efforts be at encountering God and each other. So give consideration to the vastly different ways in which we can honor this time apart and still encounter each other, and most importantly how we can better recognize the countless ways that God is constantly reaching out to us and breaking through every barrier to let us know that God is here, *with us*, reminding us that we are loved, we are valued, and we are not alone.

Dear friends, I recognize that these are challenging and uncertain times, but I also believe and trust that we have a God who will stop at nothing to reach us – to remind us that we are loved – and to give us the gift of living water. So, if we can be patient and trust in the promise that the Light has and always will shine through the darkness and the darkness has never and will never overcome it. Then although for a time this may feel strange and even a bit uncomfortable, the uncertain future that is unfolding is most certainly God’s future. Be well, be safe, and Thanks be to God. Amen.